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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHISINAU 001206

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STATE FOR EUR/UMB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: MEETING THE TRANSNISTRIANS IN TIRASPOL

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Classified By: Ambassador Asif J. Chaudhry for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: During his first working visit to Transnistria on November 24, Ambassador Chaudhry met separately with "President" Smirnov, Speaker Shevchuk, and Acting "Foreign Minister" Yastrebchak, and held a press conference with local media. The visit combined initial courtesy calls with the need to gain an open statement on Tiraspol's willingness to cooperate on the Transnistrian segment of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) roads project.

2. (C) Smirnov said he would be grateful to the USG for undertaking the roads project, but defiantly refused to sign a protocol of assurances together with Chisinau officials. Yastrebchak instead offered a unilateral letter of assurances, which he would sign. He also suggested that Embassy officials' problems in crossing the boundary into Transnistria could be resolved by providing a list of embassy personnel for whom the boundary-crossing would be easier. Transnistrian legislative chief Shevchuk underlined Transnistria's desire and need for the MCC's roads renovation project and said that the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) could pass special legislation to ensure success of the MCC project. End Summary.

Smirnov Performs Classic Monologue without
Listening

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3. (C) After Ambassador's polite opening statement about his interest in getting to know Transnistria, his desire to discuss embassy officials' problems entering Transnistria, and MCC's roads project, Smirnov took off into a monologue, barely allowing the Ambassador to intersperse a few comments. Smirnov dismissed the issue of travel problems summarily by saying that he was banned from visiting the United States and the European Union, "so, why should I let you into my country?" Smirnov then attempted to lead the meeting into long digressions about history ("we fought together against the fascists...", "...historically we were never part of Moldova," etc.,) while the Ambassador kept trying to steer him back to the subject at hand.

4. (C) Turning to the MCC roads project, Smirnov

noted that Transnistria had problems repairing its roads, and would be grateful to the U.S. for taking on this project. He then introduced unacceptable conditions. He wanted the MCC to work directly with the Transnistrian side not through the Moldovan central government, noting "we have different budgets." (Comment: That comment reflected Smirnov's lack of understanding of how the MCC project would function, as an MCC compact program would not put any money directly into any state budget. End Comment.) The Ambassador reiterated the need for dealing with one entity. Smirnov said that Acting Foreign Minister was fully empowered to work on MCC, but then announced his refusal to allow signing a protocol with Chisinau. Smirnov summed up his attitude by saying "we did not ask you to build these roads, but if you want to, then go ahead."

Yastrebchak Proposes a Letter instead of a Protocol

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15. (C) In a separate meeting with Acting "Foreign Minister" Yastrebchak, the Ambassador continued discussion of the MCC roads project, asking Yastrebchak to interpret what Smirnov really wanted and explain the Transnistrian bottom line on the roads. Yastrebchak hedged, saying that it was difficult to say, as he would have to fall in line with the position expressed by his leadership. However, eager to find a solution that would allow the project to go forward, Yastrebchak proposed giving a statement of

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assurances directly to the American side.

16. (C) The Ambassador expressed his frustration with these developments, noting that if Tiraspol could not agree on signing this piece of paper, then Washington ran a risk of spending money on a project where the sides could not agree to work together. The Ambassador said that the USG did not want to politicize this project or link it to the 5-plus-2 process. It should be kept separate as a development project. In order to avoid politicization, Yastrebchak proposed that he would sign a letter of assurances, and then have Alexander Rosenberg and Pavel Untura, the Tiraspol and Chisinau co-chairs of the transportation working group sign a document together. The Ambassador reminded Yastrebchak that Tiraspol was facing a deadline for providing the assurances.

17. (C) Yastrebchak asked for permission to make several small changes to the text that he would include in his letter to the American side. He asked that the text use the official name "Transnistria (Pridniestrovie)" instead of "Transnsitria region." Additionally, he asked to leave out the sentence about opening the Gura Bicului Bridge. He said Tiraspol was ready to speak of free movement of goods and people, but not ready to speak of the bridge by name. The Ambassador agreed that these changes should not present a problem.

Yastrebchak Proposes Embassy List to Solve Travel Problems

18. (C) Turning to the issue of embassy personnel problems entering Transnistria, Yastrebchak

proposed a solution. The embassy could follow the model already in practice by the OSCE and the Ukrainian Embassy. These organizations had provided a list of personnel for whom entry into Transnistria should be expedited. The list was given as a non-paper, not on official stationery, and with no formal request, just a list of names. Yastrebnchak then provided those names to the authorities at the boundary point, and the listed individuals were able to cross into Transnistria freely for both personal and official travel. The Ambassador responded that he would consider this approach.

Shevchuk Suggests Legislation to Ensure MCC Success

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¶9. (C) In contrast to Smirnov's political posturing, parliamentary speaker Evgeniy Shevchuk openly and directly spoke of the Supreme Soviet's steadfast support for the MCC road rehabilitation project. He noted that Transnistria lacked its own resources for such work. Shevchuk claimed that it had been the position of the Supreme Soviet which had forced the Transnistrian executive branch to start to think of implementing this project. (Comment: In meetings with us, Shevchuk has never referred to Smirnov by name, preferring instead to speak only of "the executive branch." End Comment.) Shevchuk proposed that if necessary the Supreme Soviet could pass a special legislative act for the MCC project, to push the executive branch to have to implement it.

¶10. (C) Additionally, Shevchuk noted that he was planning a project to create a transit corridor to Ukraine using the Gura Bicului Bridge. He said that this project would create a free customs corridor which would yield positive economic results.

¶11. (C) As to the free movement of diplomats, Shevchuk noted that he had introduced legislation addressing this problem. This bill would apply to all persons with diplomatic immunities, and would require the authorities to provide freedom of movement for these individuals. The draft legislation had already passed in the first

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reading in the Parliament, and in the second reading in the special commission which dealt with this issue. He predicted that the bill would be included on the agenda in the coming days for a final reading. Shevchuk noted that because of tensions between Transnistrian authorities, he wanted these issues on freedom of movement to be clear according to law. He noted that the law must be signed by the president and could possibly face a presidential veto. However, should this take place, the parliament had enough votes to overcome a veto. After a signing, a new law would take about one month before it became effective.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador outlined USG concerns on the MCC project. He reiterated the need for assurances that Transnistrians understood that a single entity would implement the compact project, that Transnistria would cooperate with Chisinau, and that there would be freedom of movement for the contractors carrying out feasibility studies, as well as free movement of people and goods after the roads were rehabilitated. The Ambassador reiterated the November 28 deadline for receiving

the necessary assurances. Shevchuk promised to speak with the "President" about the Ambassador's concerns, and to find the necessary solutions. Unfortunately, he noted, there were still strong controls at the "border" between Moldova and Transnistria, but he believed such controls should be simplified.

Comment

¶13. (C) Decision-making in Transnistria has been hampered by differences of opinion within the inner circle. While pragmatists understand the need for working with the U.S. on road rehabilitation, a small circle of hardliners have been opposed to allowing the Americans greater presence and engagement in Transnistria. The differences in approach between Smirnov and Shevchuk could hardly have been painted more clearly than in these meetings. While Smirnov approached the Ambassador with off-putting rhetoric, the pragmatic, business-oriented Shevchuk eagerly expressed Transnistria's need for the MCC project and offered to undertake special action to keep it on track. While Smirnov is a "carpet-bagger" who will one day pack his bags and return to Russia, Shevchuk and Yastrebchak represent a younger generation of indigenous leadership who care more about economic development and Transnistria's future. Between Yastrebchak's proposal for providing a list of names, and Shevchuk's proposed legislation, our problems in entering Transnistria may be solved.

CHAUDHRY